We all read facial expressions to understand how people are feeling and dogs are no exception. So they may find it confusing suddenly seeing their owner or other people wearing masks as they can’t see facial expressions so clearly. As it’s likely you may now encounter people wearing masks when you’re out on walks, it’s important to get your dog acclimatised to being around people in masks. This will reduce anxiety and help them read body language a bit better.

If your pet needs to visit your vet they are also likely to meet members of the practice wearing masks. Getting your pet used to seeing masks prior to their visit will help minimise anxiety or any distress and will make them feel more at ease during their examination by the vet.

**IS YOUR DOG COMFORTABLE AROUND FACE MASKS?**

**HOW TO HELP DOGS BE COMFORTABLE ABOUT PEOPLE WEARING FACE MASKS**

**STEP 1**
Get your dog used to your mouth being covered. Start by covering your mouth and nose with your hand, while talking and praising your dog but staying close to them. Reward them with a treat.

**STEP 2**
Next, it is important that your dog hears commands while not seeing your mouth. Give your dog a command while covering your nose and mouth with your hand, then reward your pet with a treat. Repeat this until your dog is happy with your mouth being obscured.

**STEP 3**
Repeat the last step, but now with a scarf or bandanna covering your face rather than your hand. This will get your dog used to your face being covered for longer periods. It will reassure them that this is normal.

**STEP 4**
If your dog is relaxed and happy with you wearing a scarf or bandanna, start to walk around the room. Talk to your dog and reward them with treats as you do.

**STEP 5**
Time to introduce a real face mask. Try the mask on in front of your dog. Let them sniff it and examine it themselves. Talk to them and move around as before. Let them understand that it’s normal to be around people with face masks. Again, give them treats so they learn to associate masks with good things.

**STEP 6**
Start again with other people in your household also wearing a mask. It’s important to do this so that your dog knows it’s OK to see other people with their mouths and nose covered, however strange it may seem to them.

Now you’re ready to go out in the garden or street. Reward your dog every time you see someone wearing a mask. Wear yours too and soon your dog will be relaxed being around people wearing face masks.

For more tips and advice, visit: [vetspecialists.co.uk](http://vetspecialists.co.uk)